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THE HOPE OF ART.

IN a late number we drew a distinction between the spirit of ancient and modern Art, which is well worth carrying out to its final expression. The ancient Art was, we said, reverential and spiritual, and the modern, material. Another contrasting difference grows out of this, although the connection may not at first be evident, viz. ancient Art was progressive, great masters producing still greater pupils, until the culmination of the spirituality of artists in Raphael, after which, Art losing its spiritual tone, lost also its vitality, and commenced a downward movement, and, in fact, died. The corpse was for a time galvanized by the intellect of the age, but soon this, too, ceased to act, and Art was an influence of the past.

Nothing more is needed to prove that the life principle of Art is in the spiritual nature of man, and this, again, becomes a sufficient demonstration of its religious function, and consequently of its essential use in human progress. Remember, that so long as spiritual aspiration was acknowledged as a principle in Art, it had a *reproductive vitality*, and from Cimabue to Perugino was a chain of glorious triumphs, while as soon as the intellectual became the predominant influence, the decadence commenced, and, though since that time there have been occasional instances of lofty instinctive apprehension of the truths of Art, the religious feeling has never entered as a distinct and *recognized* motive into the result, and they have, therefore, never founded a succession. If intellectual power and technical knowledge were sufficient for Art-teachers, surely Titian and Buonarrotti should have left a mighty school behind them.

It is evidently useless for us to attempt, without great masters, to do that which was not possible to the age which witnessed the highest attained perfection of Art. It is idle to attempt to establish a great school by prescriptive rules based on the practice of Titian, Da Vinci, and Correggio, when they themselves were unable to do it, or, in fact, by any kind of wisdom or knowledge attainable by mere intellectual action. We must rather plant seeds promising life, and nourish them through their normal growth; but the only element of Art which contains this life, is that which Cimabue planted, and Giotto and his successors watched and watered—the religious. It is not to be demanded that it should re-appear in the *form* of that time, any more than it

is desirable that the Art of that time should be reproduced—but that motive must, in some one of its many forms, animate the Art which shall be developed in this age.

If, however, we examine closely the condition of modern Art, we shall find that there is nowhere a genuine religious motive to be found. Scheffer, with all his sincerity and elevation, is philosophical rather than religious, and the German and Italian Purist schools are mere formalists, working in the most hopeless kind of materialism. The French schools are entirely technical, if not sensual, and the German realists, with a professed devotion to Nature, are, in reality, little better than the Purists, their devotion only leading them to disfigure and deform that which they pretend to reverence, making every truth which they see, assume some academic shape or prescribed tone. German landscape, from which, if from anything, we should expect truthful perception of Nature, is only a system of study by which, while the minor facts of the material world are represented, the great truths are denied or perverted. With the exception of Kaulbach, Cornelius, and some of the sculptors, the whole of German Art is a conspiracy to drive Nature into certain predetermined forms. English Art, again, as a whole, is only, with all its talk of truth, a kind of lip-worship—thoughtless, irreverent, and irreligious, because idle and inane.

Well may they who love Art, and regard it as worthy the love of immortal souls, look abroad over this dreary, arid waste, in which no green thing is found from the long drought, and in heaviness of heart pray that life may come back to Nature, that the desert may again blossom as the rose. Well! it may be with us a blind presumption—it may be arrogance, or it may be error, but to us there seems a cloud arising out of the sea—no larger than a man's hand, it is true, but there is life in it for all the lands. We look eastward for the light: and from the mother-land whence came the seeds of the sturdy republicanism whose first fruits were Cromwell and Hampden—Vane and Winthrop; comes also to us the new reform in Art; rooted there amidst ill weeds of many kinds, reverence for tradition, vested interest in error, perverted perception and that moral inertia which refuses to be awakened, it still lives and thrives, growing by persecution—its first fruits are Millais, Holman Hunt, Rossetti, and their confreres, known as the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, its last and highest results no man can yet con-

ceive; and, if, following that westward course which reforms have always followed, it finds an abiding place in the unoccupied artistic feeling of America, we may hope from the intensity and enthusiasm of the race, something as yet undreamed of. In this movement we find that vital principle which is lacking to all other modern Art—reverence of Nature—the religion of Art. Nor is this materialism. No man can revere Nature, save as he feels it to be only a form by which something higher than himself is manifested to him; and he whose only knowledge of the Divinity is obtained from His works, must worship Him as he knows Him, rising into the worshipping in spirit and in truth, as he attains to spiritual knowledge, the principle of reverence being always the same, only more entire, as the perception of the greatness of the Being revered is fuller. Reverence of Nature and consequent humility, is, then, we assert, the first requisite of a religious Art—and, in proportion as the artist grows in the perception of the spiritual meaning of Nature, and reads in her forms only Divine truth, he becomes more highly religious, so that without possessing the full knowledge of truth which constitutes Christianity, his Art will still be religious in the degree of his light.

Here is our HOPE, then. Here comes back the *spirit* of the old Art—the upward looking, the aspiration for something better, and the humility of Cimabue—not in the same form, but in that one which the age demands, and which will accomplish the purposes of the present. This has the vitality necessary to secure a succession, and progress. Nor is this, in any sense, an interference with the office of perfect religion. Religion consists of two elements—reverence and knowledge—the knowledge may be very imperfect, but the reverence must be always the same; and the only real antagonist to true religion is self-worship, which admits neither reverence nor knowledge, the former being given alone to that which is above us; and the latter, beginning with self-knowledge, would teach us at once our true position. If, therefore, one reverences anything, it must be because he feels it to be the manifestation of an influence higher than himself—and this feeling is the basis of religion and the hope of Art.

CONSTABLE said, "Whatever may be thought of my Art, it is my own: and I would rather possess a freehold, though but a cottage, than live in a palace belonging to another."